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ABSTRACT

This research summary examines the results of three initiatives that changed leadership training for principalship. They are: (1) the School Leadership Initiative program, a three-year pilot mentor program designed for the assistant principal; (2) the Richardson Mentor Principal program, a program designed for seasoned administrators recognized for their achievements; and (3) the Aspiring Principals program, a program that emanated from the earlier two and focused on recruiting and training potential teacher leaders for assistant principal positions in rural communities. All three initiatives focused on the skills school administrators need to be successful and emphasized mentoring leadership and leadership practice. This paper summarizes the lessons learned from the three initiatives, which include: Exemplary principals views themselves as instructional leaders and facilitators; they base their decision-making on the vision and goals of the learning community; and they participate in shared decision-making and on-going professional renewal. Additionally, participants in the three initiatives reported that for the future success of the profession, preparation for school leadership must include systematic professional renewal, mentoring, and peer support throughout the career of the principal. (Contains 19 references.) (WFA)

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Sculpting the Recruitment and Retention of the Principal

Presentation for the 2002
Southwest Educational Research Association
Austin, Texas

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ABSTRACT

Being a school principal is a challenge as well as a choice; it also may be the loneliest job in town. In this era of failing confidence in public educators, and the recruitment for school leadership becoming more difficult, how do we make principal preparation motivating, continuous and supportive?

INTRODUCTION

In an era when confidence is falling, recruitment for school leadership roles is becoming more difficult. The desire to lead and stay in a leadership position is not a position of choice; instead, it has become a position of challenge. Even with emphasis on infusion of leadership throughout the school {site-based decision-making} and de-emphasis on a more traditional managerial leadership style, school leadership has not become easier or more desirable as an occupation.

On the average, today's principal is male, white, around 50 years of age, earns $69, 407, and has 6 years experience as a principal, but 25 years in education. Only 42% of all elementary principals are female. Only 3% are African American, <1% Latino or Asian. In a 1998 survey, 3000 principals were asked which issues they viewed to be of "major concern" in terms of their job security. The following were cited most often: Unsatisfactory student performance 32%; Failure of school to meet local standards 21%; Conflicts with teachers 14%; Conflicts with

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superintendent 14%; and Conflicts with parents 14% (Strauss, 2000).

Superintendents who reported a shortage of school principals, cited most often:

1. The principalship was too stressful 32%;

2. Too much time required 27%;

3. Difficult to satisfy parents/community 14%;

4. Societal problems make it hard to focus on instruction 13%

(The Washington Post, 2000).

In a recent job satisfaction survey, the number one item most frequently reported by school administrators was "...feeling a sense of worth and accomplishment as a school administrator." (Zellner, unpublished article). School administrators who completed this survey reported the principalship to be a lonely job with more recognition given to mistakes made than to accomplishments attained. With these reports in mind, principal preparation has had to reinvent itself to fit the complexities of the school. "We invented principals when schools became so large that we needed someone besides the teacher to handle the spill over and the coordination of facilities, bodies, and time. Principals, in uncommon numbers, are leaving their positions in search of more fulfilling and personally healthful work. Burnout and 'finding balance' are hot topics on professional meeting agendas. Every state now faces a crisis as applicant pools for administrative and formal teacher leadership roles are drying up. In short, the harder those in leadership positions try to lead [in a classical leadership model], the greater the personal price they risk paying" (Donaldson, 2001, p.34). The corporate managerial model no longer works in today's schools. "We need to develop our own theories and practices [of leadership] - theories and practices that emerge from and are central to what schools are like, what schools are trying to do, and what kinds of people schools serve" (Sergiovani, 1996, p.xiii). Today we need everyone in the campus community playing a part in making sure "...no child is left behind"[President G.W. Bush Inaugural address]. Today's leadership model should include a process for building, supporting, and sustaining a leadership framework that's main focus *is* the school vision. The spirit of the leadership framework should be the focal point of

the campus improvement plan (CIP). CIP goals should be maintained and supported by that framework as well.

The leadership framework should build capacity to support that vision, and sustain a *spirit* of leadership that continuously permeates the learning community over the years. Because of this need for a new model of leadership, preparation for this role can no longer end with a certificate, credential, or degree. It must be on going, continuous, and supportive throughout the career of the principal (Zellner & Erlandson, 1997; Zellner, Skrla, & Erlandson, 2001). Aspiring principals must envision themselves as leaders who will be life long learners of leadership skill.

Preservice preparation, induction, and ongoing professional development programs for school administrators [principals] have typically taken a functionalist approach (Sheurich & Imber, 1991; Slater, 1995) to training school leaders. Principal aspirants acquire in their preservice preparation programs a set of skills and knowledge that "experts" in the field have decided they should have. They are then sent out into schools to apply what they learned. Subsequent professional development is left up to the principal---it is assumed that he or she will seek out appropriate training opportunities to acquire additional or more refined tools with which to do the job. Conceptualizing the principalship, and the preparation and training needs associated with it, in this scientific/bureaucratic fashion fails to take into account the complexity of educational environments (Walker & Stott, 1993; Zellner, Skrla, & Erlandson, 2001).

Mentoring [can be] a rich and continuing part of [a principal's] professional life. Principals often feel like isolated links in the chain of command, caught somewhere between students, teachers, parents, and the district office. Though they are surrounded and even overwhelmed by all the people clamoring for their attention, they often feel deeply lonely. They are starved for the opportunity to talk openly about what their life is like. But principals can become allies and guides for each other. They can help each other through reflection and dialog; they can help one

another create an inspiriting and elegant conversation. In that way, they can find their own individual pathway to effective leadership. (Bolman & Deal, 1993)

The Study

Three initiatives that changed leadership training for the principalship:

The 3 perspectives fall under the umbrella of some unique university/school collaborative initiatives with the first being The School Leadership Initiative Program (SLI), a 3-year pilot mentor program designed primarily for the assistant principal. A second example of a successful initiative is the Richardson Mentor Principal Program (RMP), a mentor program designed primarily for the seasoned school administrator who at some point in their career has been recognized for making a difference in their schools. A third initiative spring boarded from the previous two programs [SLI and RMP programs]. It is referred to as The Aspiring Principals Program. The program focused on recruiting and training potential teacher leaders into assistant principal positions in rural communities. The premise of aspiring principals was, through mentoring and supportive training experiences, selected teacher leaders would stay and continue their leadership in the small Texas border towns.

All 3 training initiatives focused on the skills school administrators need to be successful advocates in their communities with, parents, teachers, staff, and most of all children. Each program initiative had a strong emphasis on mentoring leadership and reflection on practice [leadership practice] that proved to be the most essential components of successful leadership for each participant. And finally, what principal preparation programs can learn from participants in the 3 initiatives will be discussed. Each initiative played an important part in what principals in today's schools need in order to become dynamic school leaders and advocates of children. Input gathered emphasized the need for a dynamic collaborative approach to sculpting resilient school leaders.

First initiative: The School Leadership Initiative [SLI].

The complex role of the principalship is best learned and developed by "observing, doing, commenting, and questioning, rather than simply listening" (Walker & Stott, 1993, p. 77) under the guidance of experienced exemplary principals who serve as mentors and guides. Thus, mentoring of aspiring and new principals is gaining ground as a recommended approach in a number of countries, including the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and Singapore, as well as in the United States (Thody, 1993; Walker & Stott, 1993).

Thanks to a three-year commitment and grant support from the Sid W. Richardson Foundation, the School Leadership Initiative [SLI] program became a reality. Reflection on practice was highly emphasized. The pilot mentoring program focused on building 12 leadership laboratories that would support a series of planned leadership activities and experiences to encourage observing, commenting, questioning, and reflection on practice by mentors and mentees alike. Each laboratory [selected public school] consisted of a building principal [nominated SLI mentor principal] and an assistant principal or selected teacher leader [SLI intern - mentee]. The philosophy governing the program was that leadership laboratories are exciting, effective learning environments in school systems. These laboratories are committed to continuous measurable improvement in all areas of leadership, instruction, and student learning. Ultimately, the SLI experiment enabled Texas A&M University to restructure how principals are recruited, trained and mentored in their careers (Zellner & Erlandson, 1997). The SLI drew extensively upon the recommendations and content of NASSP's 1992 monograph, *Developing School Leaders: A Call for Collaboration,* in shaping its mission and governance structure. The goal of the program was to collaboratively explore the full range of leadership effectively harnessed and coordinated to enhance the school as a community of learners. Program participants were prepared to embrace the belief that exemplary school leadership addresses all aspects of the 21 Performance Domains of the Principalship (NAACP, 1992). The schools [leadership laboratories] were

originally selected from 5 Texas school districts on the basis of their commitment to building a mentor program for leadership development. By the third year of the program, the SLI grew from 12 to 16 selected school sites in 6 school districts. Many assistant principals during the first 2 years of the SLI were accepting principalships and wished to continue with the mentor program. This program expansion demonstrated the need for the strong support our aspiring, novice, and seasoned principals deemed to be necessary in their quest for campus leadership positions.

The *Spirit* of the SLI Program

Commitment, communication, participation, and reflection on leadership sculpted the *spirit* of the program. True leadership laboratories were campuses that consistently followed the tenets of SLI [commitment, communication, participation, reflection on leadership]. The laboratories were actively involved in changing how leadership was mentored and distributed throughout the campus.

Commitment was essential in the pilot program. Both mentor and intern had to agree to develop a professional growth plan of action for which the intern could develop essential leadership skills. This commitment meant scheduling time during the week to discuss a project or activity that the intern would initiate or facilitate. Commitment also meant active participation in professional growth experiences.

Communication was a key factor in the success of this program. Conversations among SLI members were conducted in a variety of ways to ensure collaborative support between the university, the school campuses, mentor principals, and interns. Bi-monthly seminars, retreats, and the use of technology helped in the training and mentoring of participants throughout the three years of the pilot program.

Participation in retreats, school site visits, and development of a professional development plan were believed to enhance leadership skills for both novice and

seasoned campus administrator. Active participation in the SLI program helped the mentor and intern collaboratively design professional development experiences. The professional development plan allowed the intern [usually an assistant principal] to participate in leadership activities beyond the usual 4 "B's"[bells, balls, books, behavior management]. Assistant principals are most commonly awarded managerial tasks, which involve managing schedules [bells], counting equipment and recording items [balls], counting texts [books], as well as taking care of student discipline problems [behavior management]. None of these tasks properly give the aspiring campus leader an opportunity to make programmatic or systemic change in schools. This explains why many assistant principals remain assistant principals. This also explains why the assistant principal position is often viewed as a liability in the employment market. These dedicated workhorses are often passed by when a principalship position comes available. Without record of leadership tasks and performance, school boards and staff shy away from hiring someone who has only engaged in managerial tasks. When SLI mentor principals were first asked why assistants aren't given more opportunities to develop programmatic change for improving the condition of the school, mentors promptly replied, "...There is no time to allow assistant principals to participate in campus improvement activities;" "...I don't know how to mentor my assistant into taking more responsibility without them thinking I am adding to their work load," "...They [assistant principals] need to take the initiative by planning events and activities that will enhance their leadership skills and improve the school." "...Some assistant principals are just natural born leaders - leadership can't be taught...you just *have* leadership capability."

Reflection on leadership was an important part of the program. At first, participants disliked this assignment because of the journal-writing requirement. They were required to reflect on their own leadership skill development. This activity took time. Time seemed to be a key factor in the success or failure of this enterprise. Participants who faithfully engaged in this activity [10 of the 33 participants] praised the results of their labor. They discovered this exercise helped

them identify the types of leadership activities they engaged or not engaged in the most. It also caused them to take time to evaluate their role in total school leadership. By keeping a journal, they were able to track their administrative practice and attainment of personal goals for professional growth.

"All preparation experiences and programs should emphasize formal reflection, strategies for collaborating with teachers (particularly coaching teachers towards instructional improvement), and substantive time to practice the variety of decision making and leadership skills associated with the principalship. (Fenwick, 2000) p.18

Activities that sculpted the SLI program

E-mail list serve **- Mentors, interns, and professors were able to share their thoughts and concerns through a continuous flow of conversation via the Internet. For those principals and interns who didn't have Internet access [1996-1999] the bi-monthly journal of leadership experiences were faxed or snail mailed for comments and feed back by participating university professors. SLI participants identified networking with school administrators from several school districts as well as university faculty to be the most valued of experiences. These connections were said to have helped participants improve their schools while providing opportunities for their professional growth.**

Summer training institutes, seminars, and retreats **-Summer training institutes, seminars, and retreats focused on specific topics selected by participants to study. Themes included, "Creating Campus Leadership Teams;" Preventing Marginalization of Our Students;" "Parachutes for Our Children Through Partnerships With the Community;" "Prevention: Moving From the Language of 'At-Risk' and 'What Works' to the Language of Change;" "Making Schools Positive Places for Kids;" "Integrating Brain Research into the Curriculum;" "Alignment of Campus and District Wide Assessments with Curriculum and Staff Needs." These training experiences were coupled with book studies to support topics covered and continue today as professional growth and renewal opportunities for**

school administrators and teacher leadership teams at the Texas A&M University Principals' Center.

Development of a professional development plan **-All SLI participants strongly supported the inclusion of the SLI philosophy "...schools ...as leadership laboratories, are... effective learning environments ...committed to continuous measurable improvement." " ... Exemplary school leadership addresses all aspects of the 21 Performance Domains of the Principalship" (Zellner & Erlandson, 1997). With this philosophy in mind, it was agreed that the growth plan should include:**

1. **A plan for mentoring campus wide leadership;**
2. **A systematic way to support the implementation of best instruction; and**
3. **A systematic way to support use of best administrative practices.**

The importance of a "Change Project" in the preparation of the intern for leadership **- Mentor principals as well as university staff were impressed with the professional growth of the interns as well as with the many excellent *change projects* conducted at leadership laboratories. Because teachers and districts recognized the benefits of these projects, many SLI interns had numerous invitations to conduct seminars, presentations, and in-services. Each change project was collaboratively developed and orchestrated by the intern with guidance from their mentor. The projects gave interns opportunity to develop leadership skills while addressing real problems on their campuses. Some projects branched into dissertation proposals for interns aspiring to complete an advanced university degree, some projects lead to consulting agreements with other schools and school districts, and still others lead to the ultimate intern goal of employment as a campus principal.**

Sample "Change Projects" created by SLI interns **-**

1. <u>Identified problem</u>: Only a few teachers were involved with campus decision-making.

<u>Intern solution</u>: Development of leadership teams for campus decision-making

2. Identified problem: teachers or administrators weren't productively utilizing Campus and district assessment information. Campus and district assessment information was usually filed and forgotten until the next year.

Intern solution: Find a way to address this problem by making assessment information accessible and usable for teachers and administrators for year-to-year planning. The intern created a database that was user friendly and easily accessible.

3. Identified problem: The best teachers were asked to serve on too many campus decision-making committees.

Intern solution: Development of a cadre model for campus leadership development, which required every teacher to serve in some capacity on a committee. The cadre model helped eliminate the over use of a few.

4. Identified problem: The abundance of unnecessary student referrals for special education services.

Intern solution: The creation of a child study team consisting of teachers and experts to offer advice and alternative teaching approaches as step before beginning the referral process. The recommendations and suggestions for instruction were kept in the student's file and followed the child from grade to grade. This practice was successful in securing that no child fell through the cracks.

5. Identified problem: Two problems existed on this intern's campus; (a) an over abundance of teachers taking maternity leave every year, and (b) a lack interaction between preschool students with special learning needs with their normal peers within the school.

Intern solution: On-campus day care facility with a twist: A reverse inclusion model for children with special needs and children of campus staff and teachers. The program gave working mothers [teachers and staff] an on campus day care facility to encourage them to stay working as a vital teaching force by meeting their day care needs. It also gave preschool students with special needs an opportunity to interact with normal peers their age or younger. The project results were phenomenal in that students with special needs as well as their non-disabled peers readily adapted to inclusionary classroom settings in kindergarten and first grade. The stigma of intolerance that often attaches itself to children with

disabilities wasn't prevalent in classrooms where children had early experiences in tolerance and compassion for others different from themselves.

6. Identified problem: Disruptive gang activity and warfare in a brand new high school.

Intern solution: Building a step by step gang prevention plan that included a "safe" ground for gang members and leaders to negotiate and solve their gang related problems. This program was so successful, the intern is repeatedly asked to train police department officials in gang prevention and violence diffusion strategies.

Lessons learned from the SLI experience

Summative information gathered during the third year of the SLI program supports the importance of:

1. Including training opportunities for personal professional growth for school administrators;
2. A mentor relationship between mentor principal and intern;
3. Designating a time for the intern (assistant principal) to plan and implement campus change through a specific project(s) for leadership development;
4. University/school partnerships in promoting continued dialogue and professional development of both university faculty and school administrators;
5. Time during the school day for the campus administrator to reflect on school issues, school climate, student attitudes, as well as teacher and community satisfaction with school;
6. Campuses serving as leadership laboratories for training as well as recruiting school administrators;
7. Redesigning the *purpose* of the weekly campus faculty meetings to be professional growth opportunities for faculty as well as the campus administrator;
8. Professional renewal with peers in the form of summer institutes, retreats, and seminars for school administrators' professional growth and development of leadership confidence. All topics for the program were selected from information provided by the participants. SLI principals an interns had a deep concern for how

to accommodate as well as address the needs of all children. A common concern was expressed for students who seem to be alienated within the school culture. This shared concern by all SLI members shaped the 1998-1999 SLI program in particular.

Participants consistently asked that three major aspects of the SLI program be repeated [each year of the pilot] for their appreciated leadership development value. They were:1) an email list serve linking principals, university professors, researchers, and educators around the nation; 2) summer training institutes, retreats, and, 3) the development of a professional development plan each year that included reflection on practice, campus research, and a needs assessment.

Second initiative: The Richardson Mentor Principal Program [RMP].
Unlike the SLI program which focused on developing leadership laboratories for mentoring assistant principals [SLI Interns] into the head role of principal, the Richardson Mentor Principal Program [RMP] invited seasoned exemplary school leaders to explore ways to improve the condition of the principalship. Their expertise as well as their commitment to researching and implementing best practices in leadership was the three criteria used in their selection. The goals of this grant supported program were to: (1) foster excellence in leadership development by facilitating the building of partnerships among major stakeholders; (2) promote development of model projects in principal leadership; (3) determine key issues in principal preparation; and (4) disseminate that information to educators. The primary tenets of the program included commitment to seeking best leadership practices, reflection on leadership practice, and building a shared vision of leadership that would permeate educational settings. Incorporating these tenets was the *spirit* that *sculpted* the RMP program.

Sculpting the RMP program with the goals in mind -

1. Building partnerships:

Seventeen principals and 3 professors were asked to participate in developing a collaborative that would foster mutual trust, professional growth, and support. Participating school administrators had worked in previous collaboratives and/or school university partnerships and had familiarity with the importance of this type of bond. Invitations to participate in the program were based on their record of professional success as well as their commitment to making a difference in how principals are prepared for their leadership roles.

During the first year of this three-year program, a group of 17 principals were chosen on the basis of their own commitment and that of their employing school district to their professional development. Each selected principal [RMP] had been a vital change agent in his or her school or school district. They exemplified the phrases, "life long learner" and "change agent" in every capacity. Since it had already been demonstrated that mentoring within a supportive community fosters retention of leaders in principalship positions, the major thrust of the RMP program was to provide a supportive professional network among school leaders and university professors where ideas on best practice in campus leadership could be explored and shared. The charge of this outstanding network of educators was to explore ways principal preparation and practice could produce a change in how leaders are recruited, trained, and sustained in school leadership roles (Ackerman, Donaldson, VanDerBoger, 1996; Erlandson, 1996; Barth, 1998; Donaldson, 2001). Similar to the SLI program, communication and reflection were key ingredients in the RMP program. The use of technology for linking participating principals throughout the second largest state in the union went from video conferencing and list serves to periodic seminars supported by the use of an interactive web board. Several book studies took place. Principal conversations were built upon book studies that included the work of Schön (1987), Jensen (1994), Erlandson (1996), Barth (1999), Donaldson (2001), Ackerman (1998), and Delpit (1992). From book

studies and articles, the RMPs sculpted a theoretical framework for which their change projects and research could be developed.

2. Rethinking the role of the principal

During the initial phase of the program, RMPs participated in a variety of professional growth experiences that helped them rethink and redesign what the principal's role should be in schools today. Each RMP designed a campus "change project" or conducted research that would ultimately support a theory or give needed information for supporting a campus change. Their change projects fit their desire to make the school or educational setting a "learning community". The planning and implementation of each project was designed to take place over a two-year period. RMPs teamed up in research/writing teams [pairs or groups of 3 RMPs] with similar campus change projects in mind. Each team grouped together by research interest and program commonality. Research projects included: a) design and implementation of a mentor/support program for 9th graders; b) design and implementation of an aspiring principals training program; c) design and implementation of a dual language program for elementary students grades K through 2; d) a case study involving 3 elementary schools that have incorporated brain based learning research (Sousa, 1998; Jensen, 1996) into their curriculum and the physical setting of the school; and e) design and implementation of a curriculum framework that included bilingual students, their parents, and their teachers.

3. Researching, redesigning and reshaping school leadership practice

By the third year of the program, each RMP would reflect, analyze, and then write a report for dissemination in the form of a monograph on best leadership practices for building a learning community. RMP projects were slated to address a particular leadership and/or curriculum issue that effects whether or not the school is a true learning community. To help them with this project, RMPs participated in book studies, retreats, seminars and conferences that focused on how they could become dynamic leaders of *change* on their campuses and in their state. They shared their reflections by way of an interactive web forum

[*http://www.coe.tamu.edu/wwwboard/principals/*]
and web based newsletter [*http://www.coe.tamu.edu/~princtr/news/newscove.html*].
These activities helped link educators from both the school and university settings. The RMPs became more reflective and astute practitioners in designing what today's school leaders need in making a difference on their campuses as well as their leadership skill.

Book studies that sculpted their beliefs in what is needed to create a learning community included the following:
Educating the Reflective Practitioner, by D.A. Schön
The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action, by D.A. Schön (1983)
Diary of a Teacher's First Year, by E. R. Codell (2000)
Other People's Children, by L. Delpit (1995)
On Being Wounded: Implications for School Leadership [article] by R. Ackerman and C. Ostrowski (1999)
Organizational Oversight: Planning and Scheduling for Effectiveness, D.A. Erlandson, P.L. Stark, and SM.Ward (1996)
The Learning Brain, by E. Jensen (1998)
Teacher Leaders, by R. Barth (2000)
Cultivating Leadership in Schools: Connecting People, Purpose, and Practice, by G. Donaldson (2001)

Lessons learned from the RMP experience

An accomplishment that occurred during the first 2 years of the RMP program was the design of a 3-stage framework that included a school system/ school belief matrix. The matrix was used in the initial steps of assessing and sculpting a leadership strategy for creating the best system of education__a *learning community*. The matrix concept was based on the unpublished research of Dianne Ashby, Michigan State University, but the steps and actual matrix were created by the RMPs. One of the first steps that had to be conducted was deciding the *non-negotiables* that every campus administrator and every learning community want

for their children and teachers. Examples of non-negotiables included academic success for every child, feeling of self worth and pride by children and staff, on-going professional development for teachers, implementation of campus wide decision making, and most of all, *being* a learning community. Essentially, non-negotiables are the beliefs and goals of the learning community [all stake holders].

Quadrant I Schools:

Shopping Mall (Christmas Tree Schools) is schools where every school reform initiated in the school becomes the "flavor of the month". Every innovation, packaged program, quick- fix strategy is adopted and infused into the school's curriculum until the next year when another innovation replaces it. Typically these schools are given 9 months to show progress or a "new" innovative strategy is sought after. There is little reflection on practice and information on *needs assessments* are rarely utilized. The "system" remains the same [9 months for innovations to succeed and show promise], but the change in beliefs is high and frequent.

Quadrant II Schools:

Adrift - Rudderless Schools are schools where they hold true to an outdated belief and system. There is failure to take into account changes in student and community needs and expectations. The needs of students, community, and teachers are not addressed where the school's belief and system never change.

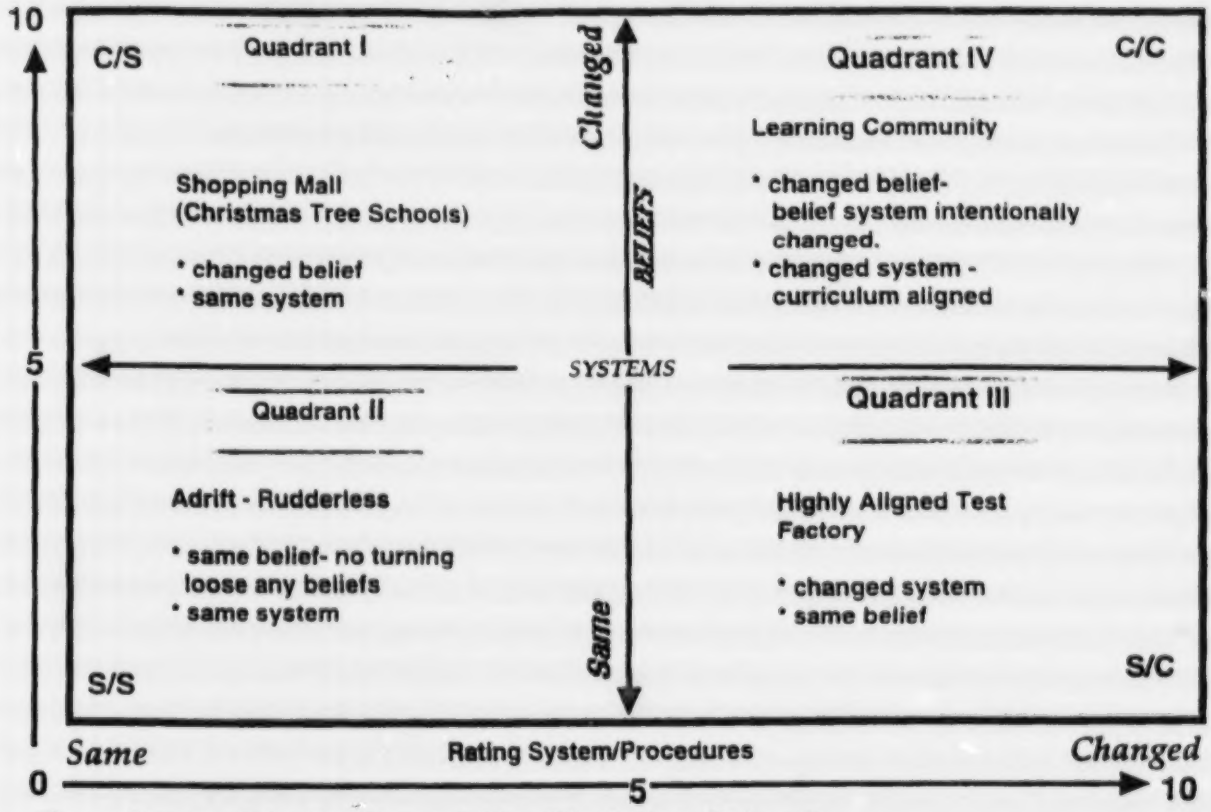
Quadrant III:

Highly aligned test factories are schools where the system changes to accommodate mandates and state standards for achievement. The beliefs of the school may be the same [example; all students can learn; all students will achieve etc.], but the system has changed. Teaching only to the test is an example of a highly aligned test factory.

Quadrant IV:

Learning communities are schools where the belief and system are intentionally changed to meet the needs of students and teachers. There is reflection on practice and a revisitation of goals. Curriculum goals are aligned vertically and horizontally. The goal "is" for all members of the school to become a part of a learning community.

Belief and System Identification Matrix



Terms from work by Dr. Dianne Ashby, Illinois State University
Matrix by Richardson Mentor Principals' Collaborative April 4, 2000

Directions for Placing A School on the Belief and System Identification Matrix

The first step for placement is to ask the following questions after identifying the non-negotiables of the school:

1. **Are our *beliefs* [beliefs of staff, teachers, principal, parents, community, children] serving the non-negotiables?**
2. **Are our *systemic procedures* serving the non-negotiables?**
3. **Rate the school on a scale from 1 - 10 for each question in (1) to (3), listed.**

From their [RMP] work, change projects were designed with the RMP *Belief and System Identification Matrix* in mind. These first steps consisted of the following three stages:

Stage I

During *Stage I*, the school principal needs to first:

1. Identify their *non-negotiables* (Examples: All students will be successful in school, instructional practice will ensure student success etc.)

2. Identify what beliefs are professed in their school (beliefs about how children should be taught, disciplined, graded, tested, promoted, and socialized). What needs to be considered are the professed beliefs of teachers, students, parents, staff, and the community surrounding the school?

3. Identify the degree to which these beliefs are shared operationally by stakeholders. (This means: To what degree do we see people consistently acting in accordance with these beliefs?) Stakeholders should include: teachers, students, parents, staff, and the community surrounding the school.

4. Identify what systems and procedures have been in place to serve these beliefs (Examples of procedures: scheduling of instruction, vertical and/or horizontal teaming by teachers, assessment scheme, alternative placement, curriculum alignment.)

5. Identify the degree to which system and procedures actually serve these beliefs.

The information gathered from the above five items should be used to place the RMP's school on the Belief and System Identification Matrix.

Stage II

During Stage II the principal should identify the following:

1. Identify what needs to be done to develop operationally shared beliefs among stakeholders.

2. Identify how processes should be changed to serve these beliefs.

Stage III

During Stage III, the principal should identify the following:

1. Identify what needs to be done to achieve the goals of the school.
2. Identify how beliefs can be maintained and reflected in the school.

The program illustrated the importance of conducting a campus needs assessment and reflecting on the impact and progress of that change by the campus leader and leadership team [teachers and administrators]. The RMPs created a leadership network that has extended beyond the program.

Things that have to be considered in keeping focus on "beliefs" as well as attaining campus goals [non-negotiables] are the many day to day items that often over shadow what schools try to accomplish. These can be required procedures and assessments; required bus schedules and school calendar; number of support staff, and teachers; socio-economic status of the surrounding community; parental and community involvement with the school; monies available for implementing new programs and staff development; as well as the school's capacity and design. Some can be negotiated [schedules, faculty meetings, curriculum, teaching strategies, training], but some we can't negotiate [poverty, school funding, staff and building limitations]. There fore educators are left to find creative ways for making a change with what they know about their school; their *learning community* (Argyris & Schön, 1978; Erlandson, Stark & Ward, 1996; Delpit, 1995; Katzenbach & Smith, 1999). These were the main lessons learned in the RMP program.

Through their collaboration and dedication to making a change in schools, they are [at this date] writing a monograph of examples of effective school change projects and leadership practices for dissemination to school leaders. They are also orchestrating an international principals' center conversation inviting principals from around the world to meet and discuss issues in leadership as well as strategies

for better leadership [International Principals' Center Conversation, 2003]. These efforts are examples of how important collaboration and reflective practice is important to these educators.

Third initiative: The Aspiring Principals Program [Del Rio ISD, Texas]

Recruitment and retention of principals were major problems school districts faced in small towns clustered near the border that divides Mexico and Texas. Dr. Patty McNamara, an elementary school principal and participant in the RMP program wished to establish a program that would identify potential school leaders and mentor them into eventual school administrator roles in these border towns. She is a prime example of what can evolve when professional development experiences are meaningful to its participants. Her leadership philosophy mirrored the main tenets of the RMP program [commitment, reflection, and shared vision].

The Aspiring Principals program [Del Rio Principals' Academy] included professional preparation and growth opportunities that supported a model of leadership other than traditional corporate managerial models. The goal of the program was to give the first cohort [5 teachers and/or assistant principals] skills for developing a *spirit* of leadership that was best for developing a learning community. Continuity in leadership practices, student achievement, staff development, and daily instruction would be the result of this new model of principal recruitment and training. The following professional development activities were included in the Del Rio Principals' Academy, which covered two years of mentoring, and training prior to placement.

1. <u>Orientation to the program</u>

Aspiring principals met with their mentor principal and cohort to discuss commitment, purpose, timeline, required reading for book studies and a two-year plan for professional training. They prepared a portfolio, which housed artifacts documenting involvement in leadership activities over the course of the training. Keeping a journal of his or her journey through the program was a requirement for each participant.

2. Self-evaluation of leadership styles

Each aspiring principal created a professional development plan, participated in a principal appraisal of skills, learned how to apply and critique their leadership growth with the SBEC Standards (State Board for Educator Standards of Texas). They also compared their style of leadership with the Model I and Model II leadership styles (Argyris & Schön, 1974, 1978; Erlandson, Stark, & Ward, 1996).

In a Model I leadership environment, the principal works hard to achieve the goals of the school [the vision] by seeking control of both governing variables and action strategies. Principals who follow a Model I style of leadership are more likely to burn out, more likely to be compelled to control all leadership decisions; and more likely to see themselves as the primary source for persuading others to accept their particular view point.

In a Model II leadership environment, the principal engages in reflective observation and dialogue with the learning community [teachers, students, staff, parents]. Shared decision-making, teacher empowerment, and respect for multiple viewpoint is the major organizational structure of Model II schools. There is commitment by the learning community to a shared vision as well as commitment to achieving the goals and objectives framing that vision.

Reflection on leadership style by each member of the cohort during the course of the program was a major part of his or her professional development.

3. Designing a professional development plan

4. Designing a 'change project' each year while attending the program

The first project consisted of learning the nuts and bolts of school planning and implementation of the plan. The cohort coordinated their plan with the Office of Instruction. They planned dates and topics to be considered for staff development during the year. They made a campus master schedule, ordered custodial and classroom supplies, created a student accountability

form, designed a Title I budget, planned a bus schedule, and made summer school flyers. They also visited a summer school site to see the implementation of a plan in action.

The second project required the design of a campus improvement plan [CIP]. They did this task in collaboration with an school/community task force. The cohort was required to disaggregate their annual student test data as well as look for academic strengths and areas of concern. The next step was to use this disaggregated data in forming their CIP.

A third project required each participant to prepare and present a mini-staff development session to the faculty at their individual schools. Projects focused on their newfound knowledge of 'brain based learning.' Each presentation was based on material covered during a book study focused on brain-based learning strategies. The particular book study focused on the work of Eric Jensen, "Teaching with the Brain in Mind" (Jensen, 1994).

A fourth and final project required the design and presentation of a campus-wide initiative to the campus steering committee.

5. Interactive web board participation
6. Formative evaluation: Reflection in Action
7. Book studies

   Several book studies were used over the course of two years. A favorite was *Making Sense as a School Leader: Persisting Questions, Creative Opportunities*, by Ackerman, Donaldson, and Van Der Bogert (1996).
8. Attendance at state and national conferences, as well as leadership institutes
9. Discussion and leadership activities with a designated mentor principal

   Participants kept a 'participation log' [a journal] to document the leadership experiences they covered during the course of the two year program. The journal documented their journey and their reflections on leadership

practice. The process engaged them in *sculpting* their beliefs and vision for school leadership.

Lessons learned from the Aspiring Principals (AP) program

A key lesson learned was that *commitment* and *time* are major concerns of aspirants. First, when participants weren't committed to the philosophy of the Aspiring Principals program, they failed to complete the program. Second, those who were committed to the goals of the program identified activities that involved reflection on practice, and professional growth opportunities that they hoped would make them exemplary leaders to the children in their communities.

The changing face of principal recruitment, preparation, and renewal:

Participating school leaders in each of the preceding initiatives greatly contributed to the following suggestions for the recruitment, preparation, and retention of exemplary leadership in schools today. The work of several educators [researchers in best leadership practice] (Erlandson, Stark, & Ward, (1996);Erlandson,1997; Osterman & Kottkamp, 1993; Argyris & Schön,1974, 1978; Donaldson, 2001; Barth,2000) is reflected in their research and practice of school leadership. The work of both practitioner and researcher demonstrates the importance of revisiting leadership practiced and the theories of best-practiced leadership for relevance in today's schools.

The *spirit* of recruitment; what it should be:

1. Opportunities should be provided to classroom teachers for developing leadership skills that can eventually lead to leadership in a team, a school, or throughout a school district.

2. Aspiring principals need a mentor and leadership roll model to aspire to.

3, School leaders should be identified early in their professional development. Undergraduates who show commitment and interest in school leadership should be given opportunities to shadow a principal.

4. Teachers who have a knowledge of best teaching practice and see themselves as *facilitators* of leadership with their peers make the best recruits.

5. Reflection on practice should be of prime consideration in the recruitment of school leaders.

The *spirit* of preparation for the principalship: what it could be.

"The pressure towards more school-based teacher education programs, visible in many countries, creates a need to rethink the relationship between theory and practice" (Kessels and Korthagen, 1999).

1. Preparation should consist of opportunities for aspiring principals to see exemplary leaders at work in a variety of rural and urban school communities.

2. Opportunity to study the "Belief & System Identification Matrix" of a school setting (preferably their own) would help aspiring principals identify how close a school is to *being* a "learning community."

3. Aspiring principals should have opportunities to practice being reflective leaders and facilitators of campus leadership instead of a traditional school manager.

4. An exemplary leadership preparation program should include strategies for building a total learning *community* by facilitating campus wide leadership, encouraging teacher leadership, and designing campus leadership teams.

The *spirit* of retention of the principalship: what it would be.

Principals who have a clear understanding of what leadership entails in today's schools would be described as facilitators of a vision rather than managers of that vision. They would be comfortable as instructional leaders rather than managers of instruction. They would focus on building a learning community with a shared *vision*. Principals who have achieved this level of leadership are more satisfied with their jobs, satisfied with their leadership role in the school, and satisfied with staying in the principalship. They do the following:

1. **Participate in continuous professional growth and renewal activities [seminars, conferences, university/school collaboratives, and business partnerships.**
2. **Study and practice time management.**
3. **Set priorities and accomplish goals that support a campus vision.**
4. **Reflect on practice, and their own professional growth.**
5. **Design a school vision collaboratively with staff and other stakeholders.**
6. **Become a member of a peer [principals] support group that meets regularly face to face and/or electronically [by email].**
7. **Use technology for sharing ideas, concerns, and strategies with peers and staff.**
8. **Mentor teacher leaders into leadership roles by disseminating leadership throughout the campus. All teachers and staff are encouraged to participate to some degree in the campus decision-making process.**

Summary

In developing a learning community within the walls of the school, there needs to be a spirit of leadership focused on achieving the goals of the schools' vision. The school vision should center on what the learning community deems as its *non-negotiables* [examples: success for all students, high achievement, positive school climate]. Exemplary school principals focus all decision making on the vision and goals of the learning community. They participate in shared decision-making, reflection on practice, and on-going professional renewal. They view themselves as instructional leaders and facilitators. They have a step by step strategy for making the school vision a reality and feel comfortable in working collaboratively to achieve school goals. As reported by the participants in the three initiatives described, preparation for school leadership, and the longevity of the profession must include systematic professional renewal, mentoring, and peer support throughout the career of the principal (Bolman & Deal, 1993; Erlandson, 1997; Fenwick, 2000;NASSP, 1992; Thody, 1993; Walker & Stott, 1993). *Sculpting* these three components into his/her career can alleviate the principalship from being the "loneliest job in town."

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